

Application No. 09/856,300

Amdt. Dated August 26, 2003

Reply to Office Action of April 4, 2003

Docket No. 1501-1149

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions,
and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-21. (canceled).

22. (currently amended) Nonwoven fabric that includes
a surface for fastening the male component of a hook and loop
fastener system which comprises:

a loop-free, carded and needled fabric of functional
fibres and binding fibres,

wherein said nonwoven fabric is needled to obtain a
dense material that has a loop-free, open structure suitable for
the male component of a hook and loop fastener to fasten thereto,
and

wherein the functional fibres are comprised of
thermoplastic polymer fibres, and where the nonwoven fabric is
bonded by partially melting the binding fibres.

23. (previously presented) A nonwoven fabric according
to Claim 22, wherein the functional fibres are comprised of one or
more types of polyester fibres and/or polypropylene fibres.

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Application No. 09/856,300

Amdt. Dated August 26, 2003

Reply to Office Action of April 4, 2003

Docket No. 1501-1149

24. (previously presented) A nonwoven fabric according to Claim 23, wherein the fabric includes two types of functional polyester fibres of mutually different thickness.

25. (previously presented) A nonwoven fabric according to Claim 22, wherein the functional fibres include spiralled bi-component fibres or multi-component fibres of the side-by-side type.

26. (previously presented) A nonwoven fabric according to Claim 25, wherein the functional fibres include both crimped polyester fibres and spiralled fibres.

27. (previously presented) A nonwoven fabric according to Claim 22, wherein the fabric contains 10-25% by weight binding fibres and 75-90% by weight functional fibres.

28. (previously presented) A nonwoven fabric according to Claim 22, wherein 40-60% by weight of the functional fibres are spiralled fibres.

29. (previously presented) A nonwoven fabric according to Claim 22, wherein the binding fibres comprise bi-component fibres that include a core and an outer casing, where the outer casing component has a lower melting point than the inner core component.

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

Application No. 09/856,300

Amtd. Dated August 26, 2003

Reply to Office Action of April 4, 2003

Docket No. 1501-1149

30. (previously presented) A method of producing a nonwoven fabric that has a fastener surface according to Claim 22, comprising carding a mixture of binding fibres and functional fibres comprised of thermoplastic polymer fibres to form a fibrous web; needling said fibrous web to obtain a dense material that has a loop-free, open structure suitable for the male component of a hook and loop fastener to fasten thereto; and heating said needled fibrous web so as to partially melt said binding fibres.

31. (previously presented) A method according to Claim 30, comprising smooth calendaring said needled and heated fibrous web so that one surface thereof will be smooth.

32. (previously presented) A method according to Claim 30, wherein said binding fibres are comprised of bi-component fibres that include a core and a casing, where said casing has a lower melting point than the core; and wherein said needled fibrous web is heated so that the casings of respective binding fibres will melt while said core remain solid.

33. (currently amended) An absorbent article, ~~such as a diaper or incontinence guard~~, which includes a substantially liquid-impermeable backing sheet and a hook and loop fastener system that includes a female component and a male component attached to said backing sheet for mutual coaction such as to secure the article in position on a wearer, wherein said female

Application No. 09/856,300

Amdt. Dated August 26, 2003

Reply to Office Action of April 4, 2003

Docket No. 1501-1149

component of said system is comprised of a nonwoven fabric that is needed to obtain a dense material that has a loop-free, open structure suitable for the male component of a hook and loop fastener to fasten thereto and is comprised of nonwoven fabric according to Claim 22.

34. (previously presented) An article according to Claim 33, wherein said article includes an absorbent body enclosed between a liquid-permeable inner sheet that lies proximal to the wearer in use and said substantially liquid-impermeable backing sheet that lies distal from the wearer in use, said backing sheet being delimited by two short sides and two long sides, two male-component tabs belonging to said fastener system being fastened to said backing sheet on each of said long sides close to one short side, so as to form an extension of said short side with said male component facing in the same direction as the inner sheet; and wherein said female component is provided on said backing sheet at the outer short side.

35. (previously presented) An article according to Claim 34, wherein one female component piece is provided in each corner of said second short side.

36. (previously presented) An article according to Claim 34, wherein said female component is comprised of a strip that extends essentially along the full length of said second short side.

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

Application No. 09/856,300

Amdt. Dated August 26, 2003

Reply to Office Action of April 4, 2003

Docket No. 1501-1149

37. (previously presented) An article according to claim 33, wherein said article includes two parts, a belt which is intended to be fastened around the waist of a wearer, and an absorbent part which, in use, is fastened to the belt by means of mutually coacting male and female components of the hook and loop fastener system and which includes an absorbent body enclosed between a liquid-permeable inner sheet intended to lie proximal to the wearer in use and in said substantially liquid-impermeable backing sheet intended to lie distal from the wearer in use and delimited by two short sides and two long sides, the mutually coacting components being disposed along said short sides of said absorbent body and on said belt respectively.

38. (previously presented) An article according to Claim 37, wherein said female component is disposed on an inner surface of said belt and said male component is disposed on an outer surface of said absorbent body.

39. (previously presented) An article according to Claim 37, wherein said male component is disposed on an inner surface of said belt and said female component is disposed on an outer surface of said absorbent body.

40. (previously presented) An article according to Claim 37, wherein said male component is disposed on an outer surface of said belt and said female component is disposed on an inner surface of said absorbent body.

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

Application No. 09/856,300

Amdt. Dated August 26, 2003

Reply to Office Action of April 4, 2003

Docket No. 1501-1149

41. (previously presented) An article according to Claim 37, wherein said female component is disposed on an outer surface of said belt and said male component is disposed on an inner surface of said absorbent body.

42. (canceled).

43. (previously presented) An unwoven fabric produced by a method according to claim 30.--

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